

Urban Voices marks its first poetic year

By STANLEY E. TERRELL

A diverse collection of inner-city experiences, feelings and ideas have come together to form what may be a fresh adventure for the Newark cultural community.

Urban Voices, which celebrated its first anniversary with a champagne reception at the Newark Public Library, is bringing poetry to the people.

The poetry which the group presents runs the gamut from political to romantic, satiric to inspirational, comedy to hard-core reality.

But each of the poets and their particular styles attempts to do the same thing — speak to, and for, the people of the urban centers.

Dr. Clement A. Price, associate professor of history at Rutgers-Newark, called the Voices “a historic, cultural juncture for Newark.

“Urban Voices is an urban folk art group, they’re folk poets. They express the great love and anger of our people, the unbounded faith, the bitterness, the failures and self doubt. But even more, they express the individual and collective love of black people for each other,”

Price said.

Founded last year by Ann Brown, JoAnne Butler — who has relocated to Los Angeles — and Marian Crewe, the group originally began to provide local poets the opportunity to coalesce.

After contacting some 14 local poets, and discussing the staging of a poetic recital, the group made contact with the Newark Public Library, and the union matured into an ongoing program of cultural expression.

The Voices offer free poetry readings on a regular basis at the public libraries in Newark and East Orange, and at whatever local forums present themselves.

“I see Urban Voices as a vehicle to be used to provide a way for the talent in the community to be experienced,” said Crewe, who is vice president of the organization which meets every Wednesday at the library.

Her feelings are shared by most members of the organization, including president Ann Brown, who said she views the group as sort of a “missionary” organization.



Ann Brown, president of Urban Voices, reads citations as award winners, left to right, Clement A. Price, Philip S. Thomas and John G. Clemons, look on

“When I moved out of Newark to Philadelphia, I had given up on this city. I felt like most people that there was nothing going on in Newark. I felt there was nothing in Newark and nothing was coming out of Newark.

“Once I started writing, and working with other poets, it awakened my spiritual self. I decided that rather than running from Newark, I would stay and try to work with others to bring the best out of Newark.” Brown said.

Sam Burgers Jr., who became associated with the Voices through a co-worker, said he views the group as “a very important tool that we are using to introduce cultural activities to the community, particularly the inner-city people who don’t normally attend cultural events.”

He noted that since Voices began staging poetry recitals, “there are many people who tell us they have come to the library or the museum for the first time.”

Myron Rodgers of Irvington, who described himself as a former “closet writer,” said he was attracted to Voices because “they have a variety of voices and personalities, and the poetry provides something for everybody.

“Right now, I think Urban Voices is part of a vast cultural renaissance in Newark, which is a potentially great cultural center. Hopefully, Urban Voices will be influential in the rebirth of arts and culture in this city.

Elaborating on that point, Crewe noted that although the primary thrust of Voices is poetry, the group also embraces artists, musicians and vocalists, and hopes to eventually broaden its scope of activities.

“We want to do a lot for the community,” Crewe explains. “We want to set up workshops and seminars, provide information on copyrighting and so forth. We want to make programs available for our children and senior citizens to express themselves.”

The group also hopes to take poetry to those incarcerated and hospitalized, and also “we anticipate some well-planned and thought-out art shows,” according to Crewe, who is also an artist.

James Brown, principal black studies librarian at the Newark Public Library, originally joined the group as a research person, but after hearing a few recitals, decided to become an active member.

“I had always scribbled things down, but I really had no outlet for my writings,” he recalls, adding, “it’s a different feeling to write poetry for someone to hear to criticize or appreciate, as opposed to writing something that will just become discolored on paper.”

Brown, who describes his style of poetry as “humorous and satiric, with a dash of intellect,” said the beauty of Urban Voices is “we are all more interested in content than in form.

“We talk to the people in the streets, we’re not abstract. We talk the language of the folk.”

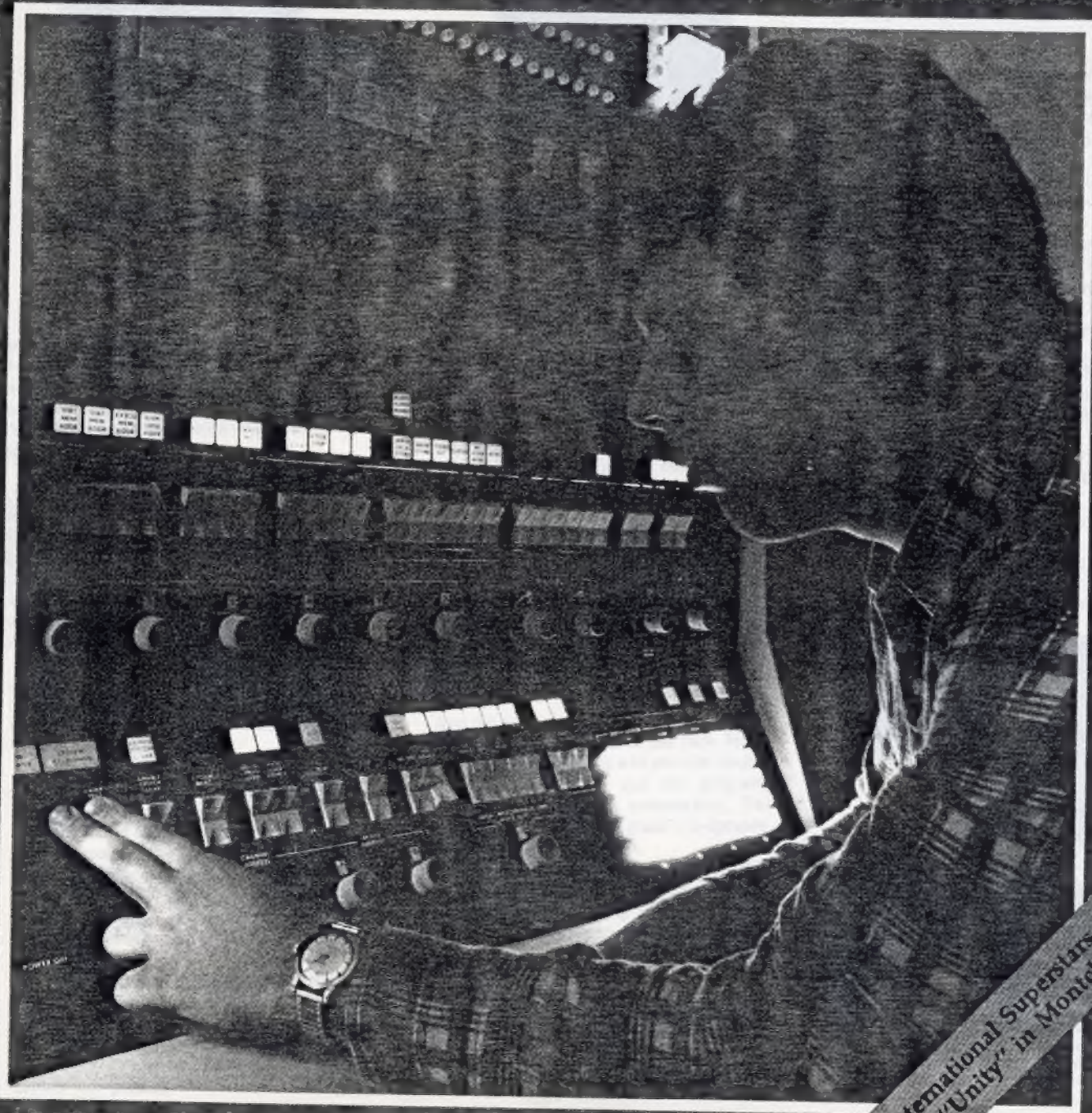
Photo by George H. Andrews Jr.

• PRINCESS GRACE ADDS ROYAL SPARKLE TO A DIAMOND JUBILEE •
• STEVE McAULIFF'S "ACTORS" PUT THEIR BEST (FOUR) FEET FORWARD •

September 1981 • \$1.00

METRO

NJIT: One of Today's Career-Minded Colleges



International Superstars
Find "Unity" in Montclair

METROVIEW



Phillip S. Thomas, urban coordinator of the N.J. State Council on the Arts, left, receives an award from James Brown of The Urban Voices at the poetry group's first anniversary celebration in July.

Expressing the Urban Experience

BY J. GREGORY CLEMONS

Ann Brown recalls that she first became interested in writing poetry in 1978 — after she became angry with a former love. "I started writing this poem, 'Color Me Tired,' and became heavily involved in it. And when I read the result, I was pleased with what I saw," she said.

That first poem was only the beginning, and poetry soon became so important to her that in July, 1980, she teamed with a friend, Joanne Butler, to start an organization where poets could read their works, learn the aesthetics of poetry and develop their craft. Butler eventually moved to Los Angeles, but not before she and Brown had laid the groundwork for the organization now known as The Urban Voices.

"Joanne thought of the name," said Brown, a thirty-nine-year-old statistician with the Newark Board of Education. "She thought it was appropriate because we lived in the city and we have a message to share."

The group, which includes twelve members from Newark and a graphic artist from Hoboken, held its first meeting in the Board of Education offices. Later, they requested the use of a meeting room in the Newark Public Library, and when Library Director Thomas Alrutz subsequently agreed to give them a place for their biweekly meetings, an on-going supportive relationship between the group and the library was launched.

"I was amazed at the range and diversity of The Urban Voices," said Alrutz. "Here were all types of people with a full range of emotions and feelings. They have a great deal of talent and potential, and by taking their individual efforts and pooling them, they will have a

greater impact on the community. We may have a major literary group here."

To ensure this kind of public reaction, Brown conducts workshops where each member, herself included, reads his works aloud. "We accept criticism because it can be very helpful," she explained. "And we let each other know how we project. You have to have discipline to be successful."

"We talk problems out in our meetings, too," she continued, "because we are a family."

The Urban Voices seeks to reach even wider audiences, and members have already performed to capacity audiences at the Essex County Youth House, the South Orange Civic Association, Essex County College, Seton Hall University, the Newark Museum, the East Orange Public Library and various churches, schools, boys' clubs and other local institutions.

And the not-for-profit poets' group was recently awarded a grant from the New Jersey Council on the Arts which will provide funding to continue free poetry and arts programs throughout the Newark community. The Newark Public Library, the grant's co-sponsor, will act as fiscal agent for it.

Ann Brown serves as president of The Urban Voices, with Marian Crewe, vice president; Myron Rogers, recording secretary; James Brown (no relation), corresponding secretary; Sam Burgess Jr., treasurer, and Daphne Benyard, coordinator.

According to Ann Brown, in the future the group also plans to coordinate and implement special programs for children. "We want them to write poetry and communicate with us, and hopefully, we can start workshops at the

Newark Public Library to teach anyone who's interested how to write and present poetry."

She added that the group is now working on an anthology of poetry, containing samples of members' poems, plus short stories and art. "The collection would be a way of sharing The Urban Voices experience with new audiences," Brown explained. One of the group's members, Conrad Webley, has already had a book of poetry published.

For Ann Brown, a poem is finished and ready for presentation when "it touches and inspires, or causes change in one's life. It's saying something someone wanted to say but couldn't find the right words to say it. Poetry is also a way of expressing oneself verbally and emotionally," she continued, "a way to get rid of frustration."

And in the view of James Brown, principal librarian for Black Studies at the Newark Public Library, people are hungry for cultural and literary activities, and the group is filling a void. "People look forward to our readings," he said, "and that's very gratifying. We're witnessing the awakening of an appreciation of poetry."

Author of some sixty poems himself, James Brown said that poetry is an excellent way to tell a story quickly. "Poems dealing with such men as Paul Robeson and Malcolm X, and with the black lifestyle, encourage listeners to explore the black experience further," he said.

Asked if there is a place in Newark for poetry, Ann Brown smiled and replied quickly. "Yes, perhaps even more so than the performing arts, because poetry is more expressive. Poetry is personal, it's you. It gives more insight into what a person is about. I think people in the city are looking for that."

"What The Urban Voices is trying to do is expose people to the talent in the city of Newark," she added, "and at the same time, inspire youth that they, too, are talented and can do anything they set their minds to."



Rutgers Professor Clement A. Price, also an award recipient, addresses the group during the ceremonies at the Newark Public Library. (Photos: Bruce M. Terry)

Urban Voices marks its first poetic year

STAR-LEDGER 8/10/81

By STANLEY E. TERRELL

A diverse collection of inner-city experiences, feelings and ideas have come together to form what may represent a fresh adventure for the Newark cultural community.

Urban Voices, which celebrated its first anniversary with a champagne reception at the Newark Public Library, is bringing poetry to the people.

The poetry which the group presents runs the gamut from political to romantic, satiric to inspirational, comedy to hard-core reality.

But each of the poets and their particular styles attempts to do the same thing — speak to, and for, the people of the urban centers.

Dr. Clement A. Price, associate professor of history at Rutgers-Newark, called the Voices "a historic, cultural juncture for Newark."

"Urban Voices is an urban folk art group, they're folk poets. They express the great love and anger of our people, the unbounded faith, the bitterness, the failures and self doubt. But even more, they express the individual and collective love of black people for each other,"

Price said.

Founded last year by Ann Brown, JoAnne Butler — who has relocated to Los Angeles — and Marian Crewe, the group originally began to provide local poets the opportunity to coalesce.

After contacting some 14 local poets, and discussing the staging of a poetic recital, the group made contact with the Newark Public Library, and the union matured into an ongoing program of cultural expression.

The Voices offer free poetry readings on a regular basis at the public libraries in Newark and East Orange, and at whatever local forums present themselves.

"I see Urban Voices as a vehicle to be used to provide a way for the talent in the community to be experienced," said Crewe, who is vice president of the organization which meets every Wednesday at the library.

Her feelings are shared by most members of the organization, including president Ann Brown, who said she views the group as sort of a "missionary" organization.



Photo by George H. Andrews Jr.

Ann Brown, president of Urban Voices, reads citations as award winners, left to right, Clement A. Price, Philip S. Thomas and John G. Clemons, look on

"When I moved out of Newark to Philadelphia, I had given up on this city. I felt like most people that there was nothing going on in Newark. I felt there was nothing in Newark and nothing was coming out of Newark."

"Once I started writing, and working with other poets, it awakened my spiritual self. I decided that rather than running from Newark, I would stay and try to work with others to bring the best out of Newark," Brown said.

* * *

Sam Burgers Jr., who became associated with the Voices through a co-worker, said he views the group as "a very important tool that we are using to introduce cultural activities to the community, particularly the inner-city people who don't normally attend cultural events."

He noted that since Voices began staging poetry recitals, "there are many people who tell us they have come to the library or the museum for the first time."

Myron Rodgers of Irvington, who described himself as a former "closet writer," said he was attracted to Voices because "they have a variety of voices and personalities, and the poetry provides something for everybody."

"Right now, I think Urban Voices is part of a vast cultural renaissance in Newark, which is a potentially great cultural center. Hopefully, Urban Voices will be influential in the rebirth of arts and culture in this city."

* * *

Elaborating on that point, Crewe noted that although the primary thrust of Voices is poetry, the group also embraces artists, musicians and vocalists, and hopes to eventually broaden its scope of activities.

"We want to do a lot for the community," Crewe explains. "We want to set up workshops and seminars, provide information on copyrighting and so forth. We want to make programs available for our children and senior citizens to express themselves."

The group also hopes to take poetry to those incarcerated and hospitalized, and also "we anticipate some well-planned and thought-out art shows," according to Crewe, who is also an artist.

* * *

James Brown, principal black studies librarian at the Newark Public Library, originally joined the group as a research person, but after hearing a few recitals, decided to become an active member.

"I had always scribbled things down, but I really had no outlet for my writings," he recalls, adding, "it's a different feeling to write poetry for someone to hear to criticize or appreciate, as opposed to writing something that will just become discolored on paper."

Brown, who describes his style of poetry as "humorous and satiric, with a dash of intellect," said the beauty of Urban Voices is "we are all more interested in content than in form."

"We talk to the people in the streets, we're not abstract. We talk the language of the folk."